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REVIEWS AND NOTICES

The Age of the Reformation. By Preserved Smith, Ph. D. New York: Henry Holt & Co. Pp. xxi+861.

There is, perhaps, no single period of Christian history about which there is so much divergence of opinion as the sixteenth century. Nor is there one about which so many and such varied accounts have been written. The consequences of that upheaval which is somewhat loosely termed "the Reformation" have been so far-reaching and persist in such measure even to the present time that an impartial history is almost impossible, even yet. And though Dr. Smith has not attained that goal, it would be difficult to find a work which on the whole bears evidence of so much sound scholarship and such careful research as this does. One can readily credit the author's statement that it has occupied his "leisure for the last six years" (p. v.). His reason for writing this work he states as "the need for putting that movement (i.e. the Reformation) in its proper relation to the economic and intellectual revolutions of the sixteenth century." (*ibid.*)

The book is divided into fourteen chapters and covers completely every aspect not only of the Reformation as usually so called, but every phase of life in that time which the author significantly denominates "The Age of the Reformation." He begins by tracing the causes which led up to this revolution both in "The World" and "The Church." The progress of discovery, the popularizing of new inventions (printing in particular), the rise of capitalism with its complete change from "natural economy" to "money economy" (p. 4)—a change whose far reaching consequences we do not always appreciate,—and the recovery of the Classics by the Humanists, many of whom adopted a neo-Paganism, all made for revolution in human thought.

It is hardly to be expected that a secular historian without a sense of the spiritual or supernatural would be able to interpret the place of the mystics satisfactorily, but one of Dr. Smith's ability should be able to get facts straight at least. It is hard, however, to reconcile his attempted identification of the doctrines of Tauler and Luther, of whom he says "both deprecated good works and sought justification in faith only" (p. 34). One glance at Tauler's "Sermon for the First Sunday of Lent," will show the falsity of this. In speaking of "the holy quiet of the

soul in God," he says; "taken in itself is not sinful," yet "it is far otherwise if one positively seeks to have it and enjoy it to the exclusion of the good works of a Christian life," or again where his statement, "No man is holy or can be made holy without good works," effectively disposes of such an identification.¹

In the Church "The Babylonian Captivity" and the Great Schism had so weakened the influence of the Popes that they were "in some respects a direct preparation for the greater division brought about by the Protestant secession" (p. 14). Dr. Smith does not over-state nor yet minimize the corruption which existed within the Church, and makes his strongest quotations from Catholic writers to show the need of reform, but his judgment is that "corruption of the Church (was) not a main cause of the Reformation" (p. 20). The section on "Nationalizing the Churches" shows the progress of the conflict between the temporal and the spiritual power in the various countries of Europe. As nations, in our modern sense, arose out of the old feudal society, and as the hold of the Papacy was loosened, they sought to have a Church of their own. This was due to confusion of thought for which one may easily account. One Empire and one Church had been all that was known. Now new *imperia* were arising, unthinkingly men said, "Why not each one with its own Church, self-contained and (what was more desired by the rulers) managed locally without interference from Rome?"

Chapters II to VII take up in detail the progress of the revolution in the principal countries which were at all affected by it, beginning of course with Germany, which has the dubious distinction of supplying the leader. There are few characters in his history so difficult of interpretation as that of Martin Luther, and it is only now that research is beginning to put him in his right perspective. He has been estimated all the way from devil to demi-god, yet no ready-cut description will fit him. Catholics have too often made the mistake of centering the whole Reformation around him, whereas though he "represented and dominated" (p. 62) his age, yet as Dr. Smith points out "no great historical movement is caused by the personality * * * of a single individual." (*ibid.*) But since Luther was the product

¹ Quoted from "The Sermons and Spiritual Conferences of John Tauler." Translated by Rev. Walter Elliott, C. S. P. Pp. 185-189.

of the Germany of his day, and since he embodied in a large measure its thought and its feeling, the storm centered around him. Dr. Smith sketches in brief but pregnant sentences the progression of his thought. Justification by faith only—even though not proven by Scripture, reason or otherwise, was set forth by him as a great discovery, and it seems to Dr. Smith (whose view we must feel is somewhat prejudiced) that it was so. Hence he justifies it by saying, "The Church was everywhere with her claim to rule over men's daily lives and over their souls. All progress was conditioned on breaking her claims and nothing could have done it so thoroughly as this idea of justification by faith only" (p. 66). Consequently indulgences made just as good a starting point as any other. The weary course of the revolution, with its attack on all authority; its excesses in the Anabaptist and other radical movements; Luther's duplicity and lack of moral principle; and the general slowing up of progress are accurately sketched. Significantly he tells us, "No period is less productive in modern German history than the age immediately following the triumph of the Reformation" (p. 134).

Notes on the Reformation in Scandinavia, Poland and Hungary close Chapter II.

Chapter III takes up that form of the revolt which was destined to have far more effect upon the English speaking world than the German, namely: that in Switzerland. Humanism first and nationalism after supplied the excuse and in Zwingli was found the first leader. The form of leadership was different from that in Germany, the Swiss reformation being at all times more theocratic. "Zwingli took the position of an Old Testament prophet, subordinating State to Church" (p. 156). The mixture of motive on the part of many of the "Reformers" is epigrammatically expressed in Erasmus' words "They falsely call themselves evangelical for they seek only two things: a salary and a wife" (p. 154).

But while Zwingli's theory of the Sacraments has become almost the sole Protestant belief, not he but Calvin gave form to the change in Switzerland, from thence to Scotland and so to our own land, where Calvinism became for many years almost synonymous with Protestantism, and in the revolt from its cruelty, the parent of the paganism and the indifference of our

own times. Why this is so is one of the strange things of history, for Dr. Smith finds "not one original thought in any of Calvin's works" (p. 163). Nevertheless Calvin was a lawyer, and his *Institutes* gave to Protestantism what it lacked before—a systematic treatment. Under his rule in Geneva the theocracy became complete. The Old Testament rather than the New was his standard, and if Zwingli had been a prophet he was more, for he actually "identified his own wishes and dignity with the commands and honor of God" (p. 175). And he possessed the necessary strength of character to carry out such a preposterous program. His personality more than that of anyone else, has fastened itself on Protestantism, and unlovely as he was, his influence has continued. Dr. Smith feels, however, that one's own predilections have much to do with an estimate of what this has meant. Though John Knox felt "that Geneva is 'the most perfect school of Christ that ever was on earth since the days of the Apostles'" (p. 174), yet "the records show more cases of vice after the Reformation than before" (*ibid*) and we are obliged to feel that "a gentler, more understanding method would have accomplished more, even for his own purpose" (p. 181).

Turning from Switzerland to France we take up a country where the Reformation failed. Here as everywhere Dr. Smith speaks solely as a secular scholar, and so gives no credence to supernatural motives or methods. Hence to a Catholic there is something lacking in some of his explanations in this chapter. Tracing the political situation, he feels that it accounts for nearly everything, but the ultimate reason of the failure was that "the schism rent the French evangelicals before it seriously affected the Church" (p. 190). The Republican tendencies of the Calvinist party, in opposition to the monarchs who were feeling the rise of national consciousness, pitted them against it, and the work of the Jesuits did much to stem the tide also. The antagonism between the Catholic and the Calvinist factions created a condition where "there was no longer one government and one allegiance in France, but two, and the two were at war" (p. 208).

The dreary "Wars of Religion" which devastated the land, brought the conflict to a draw and forced Henry IV finally to acquiesce in a policy of "tolerance, not indeed as a natural right, but as a political expedient" (p. 225). Finally, he summarized

the causes of the ultimate failure of the reformation in France, giving them as (1) "the steady hostility of the government," (2) "the tardiness with which it came," and (3) "the Renaissance," which "sapped away the interest of just those intelligent classes whose support was needed to make the triumph of the Reformation complete" (pp. 230-1).

Turning to the Netherlands in Chapter V the course of Lutheran reform, the Anabaptist uprisings, and the Calvinistic revolt are traced, the last named being the form which Protestantism finally assumed here, because it "aroused republican passions and excited rebellion against the powers that be" (p. 248), and the rapidly rising merchant class was ready for such a movement. The final division of the Low Countries into two parts was along religious lines as "Calvinism had been largely drawn off to Holland and Zealand, and Catholicism remained the religion of the great majority of the population in the other provinces" (p. 270).

The course of the Reformation in England stands by itself, and is complicated by factors not in evidence elsewhere. This makes it more difficult to arrive at the truth of what happened, for whereas elsewhere interpretations of the significance of the movement are confined to Catholic and Protestant views, here there is added a third which differs in some respects from each—the Anglican. It rests on belief in two things, repudiation of Papal authority as a usurpation and the continuity of the modern Church of England with *Ecclesia Anglicana* as it was known, for example in the days of *Magna Charta*. An Anglican may scarcely believe in God, but he holds and passionately defends these two theses. Dr. Smith observes the whole matter outside of any party to it, and traces its growth. Two classes, "London tradesmen" and "the learned proletariat" (p. 285) supported the movement, but he feels that "no change would have taken place for many years had it not been for the king's divorce" (p. 286). The history of the breach with Rome is well told, and its progress under Henry VIII and Edward VI recounted. Four main parties appeared (1) "strict Anglicans, orthodox and royalist" (2) "the Pope's followers" (3) "the Lutherans" (4) "a small contingent of extremists, Zwinglians and Anabaptists" (p. 308) and the character of modern Anglicanism is due to attempts at compromise among them. The author feels that there is "no doubt

as to the choice of the people" (p. 317) at the beginning. It was with Rome, and with Mary in the Catholic reaction. It persisted even under Elizabeth when "the mass of the people still clung to the Roman Faith" (p. 325) though "the strategically situated classes" who controlled the policies of the government "were Reformed" (p. 326).

An evidence of the author's own leanings is seen in his treatment of the matter of persecution as an element in the conversion of England to Protestantism. He merely compares the number of actual executions under Mary and Elizabeth to the detriment of the former, and takes little or no account of the many other sorts of pressure which were used to turn the people from their faith. Moreover his assertion that "under Mary the executions were for heresy; under Elizabeth chiefly for treason" (p. 336) while true in form is in fact one of those dangerous half-truths, from which this work is unusually free. When "treason" is so defined that hearing or saying Mass is treasonable, the distinction falls to the ground.

The rise of Puritanism is traced and extolled, though we cannot endorse the whole of Dr. Smith's encomium. It did prove to be, as he says, "the party of the future" (p. 346) and its effect on life, religious, social and political in England and America can hardly be exaggerated.

The section on Ireland is brief, but caustic. He feels that "the government of the island was a crime" (p. 346) and says "Had England been able to apply the method of extermination, she undoubtedly would have done so, and there would then be no Irish question today." (*ibid.*) One could hardly write a worse indictment than his conclusion that "with every plea in mitigation of judgment that can be offered, it must be recognized that England's government of Ireland proved a failure. If she did not make the Irish savage, she did her best to keep them so, and then punished them for it. By exploiting Erin's resources she impoverished herself. By trying to impose Protestantism she made Ireland the very stronghold of Papacy. By striving to destroy the septs she created the nation." (p. 349).

The final chapter (VII) on the Reformation proper takes up its course in Scotland. It was not difficult to bring about the change for truly "in no country was the corruption greater" (p. 354). The fierce character of the "reform" however, was

due more to John Knox than to anyone else. "A born partisan, a man of one idea who could see no evil on his own side and no good on the other, as a good fighter and a good hater he has had few equals." (p. 357). With such a leader and aided by "that part of the people that had the energy and intelligence to see most clearly and act most strongly" (p. 363), "the Scotch revolution was as thorough, in its own small way, as that of Robespierre. Religion was changed and a new distribution of political power secured" (p. 362) even though "probably three-fourths of the people were still Catholic" (p. 363) at heart. Mary's attempts to offset the tide of revolution, and Elizabeth's treatment of her are briefly touched upon, though without much sympathy for that unfortunate queen.

"The Counter-Reformation" is considered next, with a few notes on Italy as a preface. It is in dealing with the Latin lands that Dr. Smith shows how Anglo-Saxon he really is. "That Italy should toy with the Reformation without accepting it," he finds to be "entirely due to her geographical, political and cultural conditions" (p. 371). And though he notes the patent fact that "as far as the Italian mind was liberated (*sic*) in religion it was atheistic" (p. 373) he does not see how much this accounts for in Church history to this day.

The treatment of "The Papacy, 1522-1590" is characterized by a marked fairness in the presentation of the facts of the period. In treating "The Council of Trent" he noted many things for which he seems unable to account, but which a Catholic finds no stumbling-block at all. He thinks "The extraordinary thing about the Protestant conquests was their sudden end" (p. 388) and he seems non-plussed by it. His analysis of the Council does not strike us as so keen as that recently published by Dr. Kinsman, for he views it more with the unfavorable perspective of its own time than with the fairer view of what Trent still means, and how it has stood in history as we get away from the controversies which raged around it.

Regarding the Jesuits he says, "Let us neither praise nor blame them, but seek to understand them" (p. 398) and seems to try to do so. He notes that "great crises in the church have frequently produced new revivals of monasticism" (p. 397) and considers that in the evolution "its apogee was reached with the organization of the Company of Jesus" (p. 398). Due credit is

given for the good things its members accomplished, but the treatment of the foreign mission activity of the Society is marred by the utter disregard of the supernatural. Particularly is this true of the notice of the work of St. Francis Xavier. To try to account for this wonderful life and its accomplishments without God is futile, and even Dr. Smith is unable to do it. His estimate is that "though Xavier was a man of brilliant endowments and though he was passionately devoted to the cause, to neither of his good qualities did he owe the successes, whether solid or specious, with which he has been credited. In the first place, judged by the standards of modern missions, the superficiality of his work was almost inconceivable. He never mastered one of the languages of the countries which he visited. He learned by rote a few sentences * * * and repeated them to the crowds attracted to him by the sound of a bell" (pp. 408-9) and Dr. Smith further goes on to say that "what permanent success he achieved was due largely to the invocation of the aid of the civil power" (p. 409). To disregard all evidence on the well-attested fact of Xavier's miraculous gift of tongues may be only consistent with Dr. Smith's materialism, but to accuse his work of "superficiality" or to contend that the force of the civil authority made the martyrs among his converts is either to show a dense ignorance of the history of Christianity in Japan or else an utter disregard for the truth.

Better is the treatment of "The Inquisition and Index" for the author carefully notes just how far the former was ecclesiastical and how far a civil instrument—a distinction which can usually be made even in times and places where Church and State appeared—almost as different phases of the same thing. Of the Index he says, "Various writers have labored to demonstrate the blighting effect that the censorship was supposed to have on literature. But it is surprising how few examples they can bring" (p. 423), though he illogically concludes that it "was due more to the bondage of the press than to any other one cause" (p. 424), that Spain and Italy remained Catholic while Britain became Protestant.

The outstanding point in Iberian history at this period is that it was a time of great expansion and conquest. That the Reformation took no hold upon its people, Dr. Smith feels is due (1) to the severity with which heresy was visited, and (2) to

the absorption of interest in the new worlds which explorers were opening to view. Nor does he altogether lose sight of a third reason which had more to do with it perhaps than either of the others, viz: "a notable reform of the church" which "was carried through by the great Cardinal Ximenez" (p. 426). The missionary character of Spanish conquest is brought out rather unintentionally it would seem, but the facts speak for themselves. The author is obliged to state that "in no place, save in the islands, did the native races disappear as they did in the English settlements" (p. 437) but he feels it is sufficiently accounted for by saying that the Spaniards needed "a race of helots to toil for them." (*ibid.*)

A note on the rise of the Turkish power in Europe, the anomaly of whose existence as an international factor is noted, brings to an end what we may call the geographical section of the work.

The second part deals with what may be called the "economic and intellectual history" (p. 451) of the times. We see how the profound changes of the sixteenth century affected, not so much religion now, as business, and figures bulk large throughout the treatment from now on. This makes it no less interesting reading and gives the scholar invaluable references, but there is less requiring detailed comment. The means by which modern trade grew with "The Rise of the Power of Money" and its control through "The Rise of the Money Power" (Chap. XI) is graphically described, and how our modern international machinery of government grew consequent upon these is seen from the fact that "the sixteenth century saw the first establishment of permanent diplomatic agents" (p. 478).

Under the heading "Main Currents of Thought" (Chap. XII) he treats of "Biblical and Classical Scholarship" and somewhat unwittingly, perhaps, brings out clearly the confusion into which the Lutheran exegesis and all that has followed in its train has brought the whole matter. "The unbounded popularity" (p. 572) of the Bible, translated too often to suit its translators, and the fact (as Luther complained) that "each man interpreted the Holy Book according to his own brain and crazy reason" (p. 573) brought about "several effects that were either morally

indifferent or positively bad" (*ibid.*) just as the Catholic Church has always taught.

In Chapter XIII, "The Temper of the Times," he treats of "Tolerance and Intolerance"; of "Witchcraft" which he traces to a "savage survival" (p. 651) in civilized man, and to "the zeal and bibliolatry of Protestantism" (p. 655); of education, of which the Reformation does not show up as champion to the extent commonly supposed, but it is the section (§-4) on "Art" which is the masterpiece of the whole book. Starting with the statement that "the significant thing about art * * * is the ideal it expresses" (p. 674) he analyzes carefully and appreciatively the works of the principal masters of the time and gives them a sympathetic and accurate interpretation. How much both the Catholic Church and Protestantism have lost in the controversies which relegated art to the background can only be conjectured and bemoaned.

The final Chapter, "The Reformation Interpreted," is a resumé of the estimates of the leading writers of all times and of all schools from the sixteenth century to the present day, and he concludes, rightly enough with his own estimate of the age of which he has been writing. It is here that the Catholic finds him not so satisfactory for he cannot accept the conclusion that "the Reformation was but the consequence of the operation of antecedent changes in environment and habit, intellectual and economic" (p. 743) nor that "it is not dogma, so much as rite and custom that is fundamental" (p. 746). We feel that Dr. Kinsman's estimate of Protestantism as a distinct retrogression and arrest of development is more accurate than that of Dr. Smith who concludes his volume with the statement that "with all its limitations it was fundamentally a step forward" (p. 750).

Notwithstanding its limitations—limitations which it is almost impossible that the work of a single individual should avoid, Dr. Smith's contribution to available historical material is very great. It is on the whole careful, scholarly and thought-provoking. A Bibliography occupying 66 pages shows the wide range of his research and an Index of 42 shows the care with which it has been compiled.

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